

The Human Message of Religion for Mankind

- from a man to man

Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

We call Buddhism the **Human Message of Religion** because it was delivered to mankind by the son of a human in the Himalayan region of India who had no divine mandate from God in heaven. The message was the outcome of his own discovery of the truth about life. It was by no means a revelation from above. The credit for this goes back to a Skyan prince named Siddhartha Gotama, of more than two thousand five hundred years ago.

The first seeds of this religion came to be sown here on earth, on this terra firma, by Siddhartha while he was still a Buddha-aspirant, not yet enlightened [*pubbe' va me abhisambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattass' eva sato*]. It was his penetrative vision of the world, with all its turmoil and the stresses and strains which humans had to suffer for being in it, which drove him to look for a way out or *nissaraṇa* from it. He was prompted by a very noble sense of altruism. The search was not only for his own benefit but for the sake of the whole world, the *loka* as he reckoned it.

After experimenting for six years in his own Indian setting, in a field rich in religious theories and practices, both philosophical and ascetic, Gotama had to reject, one after another, almost every one of them as not yielding the results he looked for [*taṃ dhammaṃ analaṅkaritvā nibbija pakkāmiṃ*]. We could almost say that his enlightenment was like the award of a research degree after years of analysis and examination in a perfectly well equipped laboratory.

As we examine in this manner the early life of Gotama, seeing its transition from Gotama the man to Gotama the Buddha, we see the total explosion of the Indian myth held even by some eminent Indologists, both ancient and modern,

that the Buddha was born a Hindu, lived a Hindu and died a Hindu. The world today must know the total heresy and unacceptability of this position. The Buddha's passport would always indicate the land of his origin as India. Of that, we have no doubt whatsoever. But in the realm of religion and philosophy, Gotama in his search for enlightenment, came to know well and truly what he had to accept and what he had to reject in Indian thinking

The Buddha's religious message, it must also be said, was clearly meant for mankind as a whole, with no question of selected groups with ethnic or territorial limitations. In his vision, there were no chosen people whom he wished to favour personally. His vision was all embracing, including even extra-terrestrial life [*atthāya hitāya devamanussānam*]. All humans caught up in **the grip of life continuity** which is termed *samsāra* had to find their way out of it. Bonds of *samsāra* had to be torn asunder. The Buddha also insisted that each one had to do it himself or herself. For the Buddha only makes known the way [*Tumhehi kiccaṃ ātappaṃ akkhātāro tathāgatā*]. The followers have to work out their own salvation [*Paṭipannā pamokkhantī*].

This aspect of personal religious endeavour in Buddhism, with no thoughts of grace from an external source, we would stress as Buddhism's anthropocentricism. This is very much emphasised in the Raṭṭhapāla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya where it is stated in no uncertain terms that the world or worldlings are without any refuge [*attāṇo loko*] towards which they can turn in distress and that the world is not controlled or guided by any outside force or power [*anabhissaro*].

Salvation in Buddhism is achieved through a process of personal self-culture which is termed *bhāvanā*. It has nothing to do with grace from any external source. Or with benefits which result from ritualistic cults of sacrifice etc. It is **culture of man by man himself**. It is twofold as culture of body and culture of mind [*kaya-bhāvanā* and *citta-bhāvanā*]. Buddhism holds the view that humans have, through their own neglect, allowed the world outside, i.e. attractions and

distractions of the world, to alter the nature of their minds. This happens in our daily process of living.

We are immensely attracted at times to delightful objects of the world, with an insatiable desire to own and possess them. At other times, we are keen and adamant on removing away from us or totally destroying things of the world which go against our grain, or in other words, things which do not please us the way we want them to do. This is the sum total of the process of sensory gratification that humans go through every moment of their life. Buddhism's greatest contribution to the world of human thought is in pressing **the need to regulate this process of sensory reaction to the stimuli of the world.**

These are the operational bases, according to Buddhism, which lead us to undesirable behaviour patterns which we call *akusala* or evil. These evil ways or *akusala* corrode and contaminate our lives. We are menacingly bad by all standards in this very life, in our own personal life and in our inter-personal relationships, and by that very fact are destined to get into a worse state in our next life, hereafter.

This is the primary religious message of Buddhism of which the Buddhists must inescapably know, if they wish to be worthy of their religious heritage. It would be an equally shameful situation when non-Buddhists attempt to make reviews of Buddhism, being totally ignorant of what they are talking about. Such stupid literature is copiously pouring out of various denominational institutions today, from many parts of the world, in their demoniac attempts at proselytizing. O Father, will you forgive them? Can you forgive them? They know not what they do.